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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DJIBOUTI 001633

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2013

TAGS: PREF PHUM PREL DJ KPAO

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: DEMARCHE ON ALIEN EXPULSIONS

REF: A. STATE 250486

- 1B. DJIBOUTI 1592
- 1C. DJIBOUTI 1577
- 1D. DJIBOUTI 1510

Classified By: ADCM Haywood Rankin for reason 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In response to ref A demarche dissociating the U.S. from Djibouti's on-going expulsions of foreigners, Minister of Interior Wais deplored U.S. insistence on making a public statement. He stressed Djibouti's good historical record on handling refugees, noted that foreigners had been given an extra 15 days to leave, and claimed (falsely) that forcible expulsions had not yet occurred and that there had been no human rights violations. In a subsequent meeting, Chief of Staff Fathi admitted that the popular view in Djibouti was that the U.S. had ordered the expulsions and said that Djibouti was entirely responsible, but he displayed no greater grasp of the potential negative repercussions of pinning the expulsions on the United States. The Embassy will promulgate a public statement, drawn from ref A, with local and international news media. End summary.

12. (C) Charge had back-to-back, hour-and-a-half meetings September 3 with Minister of Interior Abdoulkader Douale Wais and Chief of Armed Forces General Fathi Ahmad Houssein. The meeting with Wais, requested by Charge, was devoted entirely to ongoing expulsions of undocumented foreigners and ref A demarche. The meeting with Fathi was requested by Fathi and dealt principally with what Fathi described as President Guelleh's lack of clarity about the contents of U.S. assistance. It was notable most of all for Fathi's frank statement that Guelleh was urgent to learn precisely what assistance Djibouti would be obtaining from the U.S., because of elections upcoming in 2005. The concluding part of the meeting with Fathi addressed the expulsions. General Zakaria Cheick Ibrahim, number two in the Djibouti armed forces, joined the meeting with Fathi just as the discussion on expulsions commenced. (Note: It was Zakaria, in Fathi's absence from the country, who made the request August 21 to CJTF-HOA Commander General Robeson for the U.S. to provide troops to help patrol the Djibouti land borders to ensure that Ethiopians and Somalis now being expelled not return, ref C.) Charge left with both interlocutors a copy of ref A talking points, along with an Embassy translation of those points into French. Charge was accompanied in both meetings by ADCM, USLO Major Anderson, and political-consular officer Beamer.

Wais and General Abizaid

13. (C) Wais opened with praise for the very close cooperation between Djibouti and the United States in combatting terrorism, emanating from the meeting of President Guelleh with President Bush at the beginning of the year. Wais said he wanted to reinforce this cooperation in every way possible. In this vein, he said that he had requested a meeting with General Abizaid during the recent Golden Spear exercise in Ethiopia. He had informed General Abizaid of Djibouti's deep concern about the large population of clandestine immigrants in Djibouti. Somali immigrants were a worry because Somalia had no government, and Ethiopian immigrants were a worry because there might exist some of them in Djibouti who collaborated with Oromo or Somali armed fronts opposing the Ethiopian government. Wais said that he had told General Abizaid that he did not want Americans in Djibouti to be worried about problems from such immigrants, nor did he want Djiboutians to be worried because the Americans now were present in Djibouti in significant numbers. He said that he had asked General Abizaid to help Djibouti in its effort to control clandestine immigrants, both on the border and within the country.

14. (C) Wais said that since the policy of expelling clandestine immigrants had been announced July 26, tens of thousands had peacefully and voluntarily departed. Djibouti had now extended the deadline from September 1 to September 15. With the departure of these illegal immigrants, the problem would shift toward surveilling and controlling the borders so that they did not return. Wais had already been in close contact with the Embassy on improving border control modalities. He looked forward to ever closer collaboration to ensure that only properly documented persons entered the

country. Djibouti and the United States, he said, were entirely in the same boat in the effort to consolidate security.

The Demarche

15. (C) Charge expressed his great pleasure in making his first call upon arriving in Djibouti on Wais and his complete agreement with Wais's positive characterization of the close cooperation between the United States and Djibouti. However, Charge said, the United States was deeply concerned about the perception among the Djiboutian populace that the present expulsions of undocumented immigrants were attributable to the United States. The concern was sufficiently acute that he had received instructions to address the issue at the highest levels of the Djibouti Government. In addition to leaving copies of these instructions, he would take the opportunity to discuss each element with the minister in some detail.

16. (C) Charge said that, as the minister knew, human rights were a basic and a legislatively-mandated principle and key element in the United States' relations with every country. Human rights became even more important and closely watched in any relationship in which the security element was large and growing rapidly. For example, Charge noted, human rights organizations that had not previously devoted much time to Djibouti were now beginning to watch Djibouti very closely, on account of the new U.S. military presence and close collaboration. The United States recognized the sovereign right of every state to control its borders and, specifically, Djibouti's sovereign right to deport undocumented aliens. As the minister had pointed out, we were working closely with Djibouti to improve its border security.

17. (C) Charge said that the United States had had no role whatever in the formulation of Djibouti's policy to expel foreigners. We were deeply concerned about reports on human rights abuses that were occurring as a result of these operations. It might be that such reports were false, but whether true or false, they came in the context of a public perception that the United States was behind the operations. While the United States recognized Djibouti's absolute sovereign right to deport aliens, it held as a fundamental principle that deportations be carried out in a fully transparent manner and with full assurance of fundamental, internationally-recognized human rights. Djibouti had thus far engendered no focused hostility from within the U.S. Congress or among human-rights groups, but unless it were careful in its handling of its expulsion operations, that situation could change. Moreover, there was the possibility of unfortunate accidents and unintended events -- for example, deaths of deported persons in the deserts of neighboring states -- which would be blamed, derivatively, on the United States.

18. (C) In addition to the points in his instructions, Charge continued, he wanted to point out that there was a security concern on the part of the CJTF-HOA emanating from the public perception of U.S. instigation of the expulsions. It was clear that many people, Djiboutian and non-Djiboutian, were opposed to the operation. Some of these people could conceivably direct their anger toward the United States, given the wide perception of U.S. involvement. CJTF was concerned that it might have to lower its profile, with consequences for its civic-action and humanitarian projects in Djibouti as well as liberty for its soldiers to move outside the camp, with concomitant negative economic consequences for Djibouti. (Note: This point was raised by General Robeson during Charge's introductory call on him September 2.)

19. (C) Charge, concluding, said that the United States would make a public statement dissociating itself from Djibouti's expulsion policy. In regard to the minister's request for assistance of the previous week (note: Wais requested an immigration information program, creation and enlargement of transit centers, rehabilitation of former prisons, 20 trucks, 10 jeeps, and 300 tents, ref B), the United States would not be able to address the items as an expedited package, although it might be possible to discuss certain elements in the future under propitious conditions.

Wais's Regret

110. (C) In response, Wais provided a lengthy review of what he described as Djibouti's excellent and humane record in handling refugees, including those from the 1977 Ethiopian-Somali war immediately after Djiboutian independence, those later from the fall of Mengistu, those from Siad Barre's attack on Somaliland, those from the

bloodshed and instability that flowed from Siad Barre's fall, and also refugees from war and instability in Eritrea and Yemen. The present operations did not touch any of these refugees, nor did they touch those foreigners who were at present requesting asylum. These operations affected only those persons who were present in Djibouti with no legal standing whatever. Considering the respect and dignity which Djibouti had always afforded all persons who had ever entered its territory and who could provide the least indication of refugee or asylum status, Wais deplored and regretted that the United States now sought to make a public statement of this kind. False rumors and disinformation were an unfortunate part of the world today. It was necessary to operate not by rumor but on the basis of reality. The Charge's officers in the Embassy should have properly informed Washington on these issues and undertaken full discussions with Djibouti before embarking on such a public statement. The Charge was free to go where he liked, when he liked, throughout Djibouti to see for himself the falseness of these rumors. The government had not yet started operations at all, but merely invited illegal foreigners to leave; no one had been touched or harmed. So many people had already departed the country, following his many broadcasts on television and radio, that he did not think there would be any need for a mass expulsion operation.

¶11. (C) Charge said that the present demarche and public statement were in no way intended to criticize Djibouti in its handling of refugees in the past. The issue was the association of the United States as author of a policy which engendered much opposition and much bad press. Djibouti's relations with the United States would now be held to a higher standard than previously and it was in the interest of both nations that the United States not be associated with this policy. Our public statement would serve both nations' interests.

¶12. (C) Wais said that Djibouti remained confident in its policy and proud of its record on human rights. It would not change its policy. He hoped that American preoccupations about the expulsions policy would dissipate when it became clear that rumors of human-rights violations were completely false. He hoped that officers in the Embassy would portray accurately for the Charge Djibouti's exemplary record and the extraordinary warmth with which the Djiboutian people had welcomed the U.S. military into their midst.

Less Defensive Chief of Staff

¶13. (C) At the conclusion of the separate, follow-on meeting with Chief of Staff General Fathi, Charge raised the issue of expulsions and the particular problem the United States had with being portrayed as responsible for them. Fathi immediately interjected that, indeed, people in Djibouti did believe that the U.S. had ordered the expulsions. Charge remarked that this perception created a serious problem for the U.S. politically, to which Fathi seemed surprised and asked why?

¶14. (C) Charge furnished Fathi with ref A talking points and offered a precis of the demarche. In sum, he said, associating the U.S. with the expulsions could only diminish the considerable support that Djibouti's relations with the U.S. now enjoyed in the Congress and among human-rights groups. Fathi remarked that problems with Congress were an issue for the United States not Djibouti, to which Charge demurred. The Embassy was going to put out a public statement underlining that the United States had nothing to do with the policy. Fathi said that it was incumbent on the Embassy to set the record straight with policy-makers in Washington. Charge replied that reports in the press carried far more impact than anything that an embassy might report. Then, Fathi exclaimed, it was for the embassy to invite in journalists and set them straight. Indeed, the policy to deport illegal foreigners was a Djiboutian decision by the Djiboutian government. Such foreigners represented forty percent of the population, at a time when the unemployment rate was increasing. If a Djiboutian went to Ethiopia or Yemen he was not permitted to work, so why should Ethiopians or Yemenis come to Djibouti? Charge repeated that the United States completely recognized Djibouti's sovereign right to make this policy. Fathi said, "We are responsible for it, and we take the responsibility."

¶15. (C) Comment: Wais took this demarche much harder than Fathi, as he had much more at stake in the policy. It caught Wais unawares, and his surprise and the difficulty he had in comprehending the rationale for the demarche and public statement are a measure of how poorly he comprehended the human-rights ramifications of the expulsions and the implications for the Djibouti-U.S. relationship. The entire Djiboutian power elite may share much the same lack of comprehension. Wais's assertion that the expulsions had not yet started was simply false. We suspect that Wais was

behind media leaks pointing to U.S. complicity. Fathi notably made no attempt to associate the current expulsion policy with a security need. Rather, he emphasized the economic and employment dimension, in contrast to Zakaria's earlier emphasis on security (ref C).
SMITH